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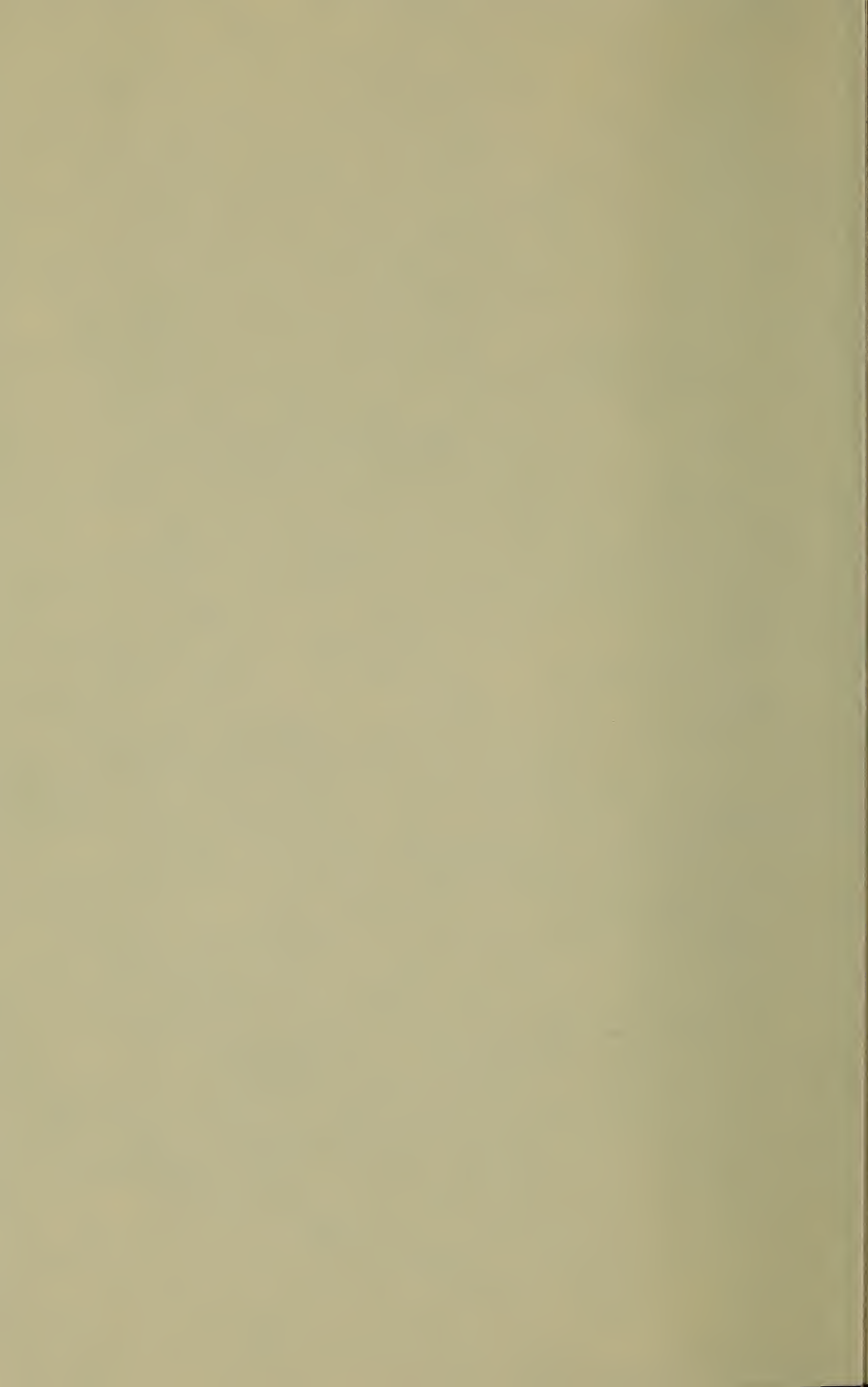
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RHYMES OF A ROUNDER

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IN AMBER LANDS

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BY

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Somewhat Concerning Ballades

ONE morning in September I was strolling downhill toward the gray waterfront of Montreal. It was a morning to make one polite, and I was on business of no particular importance. Passing a fruit-stall, I saw a little boy looking wistfully at a heap of August apples. They were streaked with red and pale green, and to a knowing eye well advertised the delicious tart juiciness between the core and the peel. In my mood I asked the boy to have some. He filled his pockets, and I took a couple for myself. They smelt good, and we ate them as two comrades, and with much smacking of our lips, on our way down a quiet side street.

Already the remote air of autumn was over the city. Domes and steeples, churches, hotels, tenements, gaunt factories and commercial palaces, all alike were steeped in a fine golden haze. The trees were coloring red and yellow in the surpassing way of Eastern Canada. About our autumn there is a lethal glamour; it is forever hinting at perennial loveliness beyond the mould and compass of this world; in high faith declaring it, even while sinking before the desolate, desperate, white face of winter. And in the fey light of that morning, and the apparent passing of things, I

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went figuring another mode of time, wherein the world and all is more happily perceived. To my immediate environment, however, I was recalled by a delighted exclamation from the boy. He had his eye on a gory picture, displayed in a shop window, by which he halted. There was a battle scene from some belated Christmas annual; furious masses of men; trampling horses; the glint of sword and bayonet; the reek of cannon; uproar, blood, and fire. He wanted the picture very much, and that morning found that so far as I was concerned to ask was to receive.

The shop from the outside was dingy and altogether unpromising. But within there seemed to me a perfect treasure-trove of books. They were stacked in rather disorderly fashion on counter and shelves; many books greatly valued by a few, others to meet a more general taste, but little of the whole store really popular except the magazines. Because of dusty panes, and patches of brown and yellow paper pasted on them where the sun shone through, there was an atmosphere in the shop that made me think of amber and meerschaum. There were bluish rays through it from two small windows at the rear. The bibliopole in charge looked like a wood-cut from an early edition of Dickens or Balzac. He was rather tall and spare of frame, with a thin gray whisker, and he peered at me with eyes guileless as those of a baby or an old sea captain. His manner was courteous, but all the while he seemed intent on something quite apart from his

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shop and his customer. I felt that he was more or less indifferent about the sale of books, and that he would much rather talk of them to any one whom he could deem an equal in bibliography. My esteem for him was deepened by repeated visits, and I found that he had a notable class of patrons. Eventually he got the notion that I had a taste for verse of the exotic or decadent order. This I might have denied, but on my second visit to his shop I happened to ask if he knew of any good metrical translation of Baudelaire, and from that question I suppose he came to a conclusion. It served to give me a somewhat hazy interest in his eyes, so I played up to the role assigned me, and as a result he brought various books to my attention which had been before that unknown to me. Among other things needed for my education, he suggested an anthology of English verse done in antique Romanesque and Gallic forms.

I always approach an anthology in the same dull, half-hearted way that I do a picture gallery or a table-d'hôte dinner. The things presented mix in spite of me; they acquire a composite, inferior flavor from each other; I get stuffed without any distinct satisfaction. In an anthology there is nothing to match; one poem jars with another; there is not that harmonizing undertone imparted to a volume by a single author, whose manner and personality prevails through every line from the first to the last page. So I was not at first rightly made acquainted with these intri-

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cate medieval forms. For all practical purposes I had been ignorant of them until I bought the anthology. Of their value in old French, or as to how well they satisfied an ancient demand, I cannot judge, for I am not learned in these matters. But from what I read of them they seemed for the most part parlor trifles, curios in rhyme, verbal bric-a-brac to the vigor of English unsuited. I found a few turned out in slang by Halverson of Toronto—ballade, villanelle, triolet, rondeau and roundel—more to my liking than the labored conceits of the anthology. And, doubtless, in Old Provence, when some troubadour-knight would set forth in springtime, with merry jongleurs by his side, to visit a neighboring castle, his plaints and love-songs uttered in these involved forms made good listening for all his audience. But in first attempting them I felt as if I were fingering obsolete instruments in the dead atmosphere of a museum; rotes, rebecks, ghitterns, theorbos, giques, cloncordes, galoots, and what not troubadourish fiddles; goblin-bellied things fantastically stringed; well enough one time maybe for a low serenade to some lady barely out of reach, but now fit for little more than a toy symphony. However, I am quite ready to admit that these forms may have merit beyond my appreciation. Certainly I have never been so crass as to undervalue precise form in verse. Quite the contrary. To me some verse-forms are destinate vehicles of poetic emotion; so much so as to appear in the order of nature. For

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just as various minerals strive to crystal according to the pattern chosen by their informing spirit, so certain moods will seek formal verbal expression, will seek to crystallize, and in so doing achieve an effect beyond the mere meaning of the words. Some of these forms will appear and persist through many languages. These are essential forms, determined not so much by the style or measure of a line as by the combination of lines in a stanza and the rhyme sequence. They have a quality akin to polarity. Consider, for instance, the Italian sonnet; its octave and sestet, its measures and rhyme-sequence, are no more arbitrary or artificial than the cube or hexagon or octagon in which some minerals express their highest vital activity. The English sonnet, the one original poetic form used by Shakespeare, altho inferior in form-value to the Italian, is nevertheless an essential form if written as four alternately-rhyming quatrains clinched by a couplet. When it does not show these lines of cleavage it is merely a fourteen-line poem, which can be as well done with twelve or sixteen lines so far as nicety of form goes. I had a fair acquaintance with all verse forms made native to English in the past, and after some examination of the Romanesque forms in the aforesaid anthology I felt entitled to express an opinion concerning them. Of these restricted forms it seemed to me that with the exception of the Italian sonnet there was nothing to equal in form-value the French ballade. Yet in English we

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find a hundred good sonnets for one good ballade. And some writers ask why, for the forms are equally ancient, and the one is no more difficult of achievement than the other. Yet the true reason should be apparent at a glance. Think what would have been the fate of the Italian sonnet in English if Petrarch, Tasso, Michael Angelo and other Italians who confirmed its shape had been misled into making the rhymes of its sestet answer to the rhymes of its octave. If they had we may be sure that Mister Schoolmaster would have insisted upon keeping such a big drum blunder unaltered, and would have been supercilious toward any other form and called it illegitimate, a term which he impertinently applies sometimes to the Shakespearian sonnet. The Italian sonnet in English would then have been as blighted with monotony as is now, for the most part, the French ballade. To this point I will return later when dealing with ballade structure.

Of poetic forms in general it is to be noted that while literature sticks to its own language the forms pass on. To lift a masterpiece from one language to another is a bit of magic seldom accomplished. But it is done at times without loss; it may be even with some gain. The fine English of Cranmer and other Elizabethan scholars probably improved what there is of literature in the Bible. No doubt Keats saw the glory of Homer through Chapman. Baudelaire gave Poe to France, as Fitzgerald gave Omar to us; Schlegel, they say, has

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given Shakespeare to the Germans. But such translations are indeed rare. Poetic forms, however, are easily adapted from one language to another; in fact, the forms will outlast the language in which they first appear. In some languages we find an excess of rhyme, rich or insipid, according to the twist of our ear. This seems to have been especially true of the Lang d'Oc. About the cord of that language the poets of Provence gave first shape to the alba, serena, sirvente, canza, rondel, triolet, virelai, villanelle, and other verse-forms. Truly crystalline they appear, but blurred with unvaried rhyme. For excuse it may be said that in the Lang d'Oc it was probably more difficult to keep the rhymes out of a stanza than put them in, and so, in order to maintain the metrical restrictions and exclusiveness which some poets think a necessary part of their art, most of these poems were made to keep to one set of rhymes, those associated in the first stanza. This custom added to the difficulties of achievement, but largely at the expense of virility, color and euphony, the qualities most worth while in any poem. These troubadours of Provence trained themselves to many vaudeville tricks as a part of their calling, such as catching apples on the point of a dagger, leaping through rings, playing a great variety of instruments in difficult positions. It was all taken as part of their profession. And so quite naturally the spirit of vaudeville, the love of aptly doing difficult things in the most difficult way, made its in-

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fluence felt in their verse-making. The poets of Northern France, whose tongue was destined to survive the Lang d'Oc, took over these Provence forms, clung to their monotone rhyme system, and still further elaborated them. Then appeared the French ballade and the chant royal, the latter a monster of intricate monotony which in English is fairly humpbacked with the rhyme it carries. It staggers to a weary close after supporting sixty-one lines on a shift of only five rhyme-tones. Those who achieve these things may be word jugglers; those who get delight of them may be persons of precise culture; but musicians they are not. The chant royal is a trick for the sake of a trick; vaudeville triumphant in verse. And so with some other of these forms, these *tours de force*, notably the sestina. They all, however, have been seriously and exhaustively discoursed upon by old writers. If one chooses to study them, he may begin so far back as the year 1390, when appeared "The Art of Making Chansons, Ballades, Virelais and Rondels," by Eustache Deschamps; about a century later Henry de Croi published "The Art and Science of Rhetoric in the Making of Rhymes and Ballades"; then followed a treatise by one Antonio Tempo on the forms collected in "The Spanish and Italian Apollo" of Rabanus Maurus; and so on down the centuries, until in English one comes to Austin Dobson. In the Library of Parliament are several such books. But there is some danger in the study of them; you will risk the obses-

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sion of rules; you may become a mere metrical virtuoso, and lose what poetic vision you have; either that, or you will begin to scunner at all verse. The fine points of poetic form should be apparent at sight; should be appreciated without study; should, above all, not be rendered distasteful by pedantic anatomy. One admires a beautiful body, but the sense of beauty vanishes with dissection. Beauty can never be the subject of precise analysis; it can never be evoked by formulas. Beauty is a spirit of which we are for a moment aware through some inexact synthesis of odor, color, sound, shape, motion, or verbal allusion. It arouses in varying degree a characteristic emotion, somehow reminiscent, somehow premonitory, under stress of which we vaguely feel the need of other senses with which to embrace something supremely desirable and presently unattainable. Beauty for our perception must have a body of some kind, but being too finical as to its body is the surest way to lose it. And so while poetic technique is well enough in its way, yet verse whose excellence is estimated by good conduct marks for obedience to rules and established usage has but the lowest form of beauty; it sinks to the level of being merely skilful, mathematic, or true to type. And this is well shown of ballads and ballades, concerning which I have learned a little for those who may be willing to take my say-so without troubling further.

There is a Latin verb, "ballare," to dance. Ball,

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ballet, billiards, ballad and ballade all come out of this verb. But now a ballad has little to do with dancing, and a ballade nothing. Yet always a thing is older than its name, and like enough the ballad as a combination of song and dance was universal long before Latin was contrived; probably it was familiar to folk of the Stone Age. Touching on this point, Puttenham said some time ago:

“Poesie is more ancient than the artificiall of the Greeks and Latines, and used of the savage and uncivill, who were before all science and civilitie. This is proved by certificate of merchants and travellers who by late navigations have surveyed the whole world, and discovered wild people, strange and savage, affirming that the American, the Perusine, and the very Caniball do sing and also say their highest and holiest matters in certain riming versicles.”—*Art of English Poesie*, 1589.

The ballad as a popular song, the ballad as a popular epic, and the ballade as a highly evolved poetic form beyond popular appreciation have this one feature in common—the repetition of idea and phrase. This repetition is irregular in most songs and epics, regulated in such forms as the English roundelay and the Scotch ring-sang, and precise in the ballade, as hereafter shown. It is worth noting that the English term “roundelay” is applied equally to songs and dances in which certain parts are repeated at set intervals. This tendency to rhythmic repetition continues

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through all songs sung by men in the open, and generally appears in the song and dance ballads rendered by the cantabanks of modern vaudeville. Here is a specimen stanza, picked up at random on the wharves of Montreal:

As I went strolling down the street,
All in the town of Rio,
A damsel neat I chanc'd to meet
Who closed at me one eye-o,
Who winkt at me her eye-o! (jig ad lib.)

Note, please, the last two lines. They exemplify a certain poetic device used as naturally and instinctively now by common song-smiths as it was used ages ago in primitive Hebrew prosody. I mean the repetition of the same idea with some variation of words. Why this trick should be pleasing or effective I do not know; but at times it is so very much. Perhaps it has some hypnotic influence. David continually resorted to it in his psalms; and it has been used by many writers of English verse. I quote the following examples as I find them ready to hand; there may be others better:

Praise him upon the loud cymbals:
Praise him upon the high-sounding cymbals.

—David.

Our soul is bowed down to the dust:
Our belly cleaveth unto the earth.

—David.

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He raiseth the poor out of the dust:
He lifteth the needy out of the dunghill.

—David.

As the scoriac rivers that roll,
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous torrents down Yaanek
In the ultimate climes of the pole:
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole.

—Edgar Allan Poe.

And suddenly 'twixt his hand and hers
He knew the twenty withered years—
No flower, but twenty shrivelled years.

—Francis Thompson.

My theory is that certain emotions, ranging from ribald to sacred, if awakened in men of certain brain and temperament, will manifest fixt verbal forms, irrespective of age or language, as fitly and inevitably as crystals about a cord, or frost-flowers upon a window-pane.

These forms vary greatly in construction and intricacy. Among the Hebrews they appear rudimentary; among the Persians they appear more complex than any used by the most extravagant rhymers of old France.

The ballad in vogue in England and Scotland during the Middle Ages was a lay, or narrative poem, of simple and loose construction, and was concerned mainly with chivalric combat, beleaguered love, or some adventure in bright or dark faery. It was chanted at will to the vamping of a harp; contained an

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indefinite number of stanzas of four, six or eight lines, alternating usually on four and three accents, the lines of three accents rhyming, the others unrhymed, or rhyming on themselves. Free use was made of assonance and alliteration. The following stanzas are quoted to show the average form and structure of these old ballads:

Hearken to me, gentlemen;
Come and you shall hear,
I'll tell of two of the boldest brethren
That ever born y-were.
(Ballad of King Estmere, 15th Century.)

And I would never tire Janet
In fairyland to dwell,
But aye at ilka seven years
They pay the teind to hell:
And I'm so fair and fat o' flesh
I fear 'twill be mysel.
(Ballad of Tamlane, 16th Century.)

Gowden glist the yellow links
That round her neck she'd twine;
Her eyen were o' the skyie blue,
Her lips did mock the wine;
The smile upon her bonnie cheek
Was sweeter than the bee;
Her voice excellt the birdie's song
Upon the birchen-tree.
(Ballad of the Mermaid, 16th Century.)

Sometimes these ballads had a refrain or chorus at the end of each stanza; sometimes a *hey-derry-down* between the lines, like the *gai-faluron-falurette* of the ancient French songs which one may hear in Quebec. Here is a refrain intended to be imitative:

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As I cam in by Garioch land
And doun by Netherha',
There were fitty thousand Hielandmen
A' marching to Harlaw,
Wi' a drie drie drie didronilie drie.
(The Raid of Redswire, 16th Century.)

A notable instance of a form passing to another language is found in one of the old ballads, the "Battle of Harlaw." In that ballad is used the exact stanza of the French ballade; the stanza used by Villon in carrying on the tale of his Testaments. I quote two stanzas:

The armies met, the trumpet sounds,
The dandring drums aloud did tuck:
Baith armies biding on the bounds
Till ane o' them the field should brook:
Nae help was there, for nane would douk,
Fierce was the fight on ilka side,
And on the ground lay many a buck
Of them that there did battle bide.

Sir James Scrimgeor of Duddop, knight,
Great Constable of fair Dundee,
Unto the duleful death was dight,—
The King's chief bannerman was he:
A valiant man of chevalrie,
Whose predecessors won that place
At Spey, with gude King William frie,
'Gainst Murray and Macduncan's race.
(Battle of Harlaw, 16th Century.)

Such a form, however, is too involved for a straight-and-away story such as the old minstrels wished to tell. For what they wanted was a form to carry or make memorable a story, not a form to dominate a

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sentiment or scrap of philosophy as supplied by the French ballade. The English ballad was brought to perfection by the Scotch. It was in that lost time when the Lowlanders of the Border were the knightliest people of Europe. And that was before the time of Burns; before the sway of the Shorter Catechism and the smut of its reaction; a time when the true religion of the Border was high in the afterglow of legendary days—Gothic, Celtic, Arthurian, if you please—but far above Geneva and unafraid of Rome. As a last echo of that time will you find in any other literature lines so simply loyal and lorn as these:

When day is gone, and night is come,
And a' are boun to sleep,
I think on them that's far awa'
The lee lang night and weep, my dear—
The lee lang night, and weep!

(Early Jacobite.)

or of quainter omen than these:

Yestreen I saw the new Moon
Wi' the auld Moon in her arms,
And I fear, I fear, my Master dear,
We shall have a dreadful storm!

(Sir Patric Spens, 16th Century.)

The French ballade is in nearly all respects distinct from the ordinary ballad. Its form is precise; it has no story to tell; its manner is lyric; its motive didactic. It is a vehicle for the reiteration of some sentiment or aphorism. Those who essay it

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in English have been content with the final "e" of French spelling, and consequent accentuation of the second syllable, to distinguish it in name from the English ballad. Some other name might better have been chosen for sake of distinction. But however it be called a French ballade may be made in English in this manner: Take a single sentiment; beat up a tune answering to a line of three, four or five accents, but preferably four; strain the sentiment over eight such lines with a rhyme-sequence of a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c; put the kernel of your idea, or the emphatic color of your sentiment, into the last line as the burden or refrain of the poem. Then make two more such stanzas, using the same rhyme-tones in the same order, and keeping the last line in each stanza the same as the last line of the first stanza. Having done this, smoothly finish the thing off with a quatrain, call it the envoy, address it by way of compliment to your prince, mistress, creditor, or other person in authority; keep the same rhyme-tones for this quatrain with the sequence b, c, b, c, and the refrain unaltered as in the preceding stanzas. This will be a ballade of the first form.

The second form has three stanzas of ten lines with a rhyme sequence of a, b, a, b, b, c, c, d, c, d, and an envoy of five lines rhyming c, c, d, c, d. Ballades of the first form are allowed three rhymes; those of the second form, four rhymes. And if your pedantry ex-

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ceeds your esthetic sense, and you would show your skill, then you will permit the length of your refrain to not only dominate the length of each line, but if your refrain contains eight syllables you will adopt the eight-line stanza, and if ten syllables then the ten-line stanza; and if neither eight nor ten syllables, then you will throw it aside and try another. The double ballade, the ballade of double refrain, and the chant royal are ballades built rococo. The double ballade has six stanzas of eight or ten lines with or without an envoy. The ballade of double refrain has a subordinate refrain which occurs in the fourth line of each of the first three stanzas, and the second of the envoy, with a rhyme sequence of a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c, and the envoy rhyming b, b, c, c. To the chant royal I have already referred in a cursory way. The baroque ballade discards the refrain and envoy altogether, and is of indefinite length. It is the eight-line stanza of the first form continued till the theme is exhausted; each stanza independent as to its own rhymes, but keeping to the order of the first form; that is, a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c. This is a fine virile form, suited for descriptive, reflective, or even narrative verse, as shown by the Scotch ballad above quoted, the "Battle of Harlaw." No doubt the finest baroque in English is Swinburne's translation of Villon's "Complaint of the Fair Armouress." Unfortunately, Swinburne for once grew prudish, and gave us Villon's greatest poem disfigured with printer's fig leaves.

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This was a shameful thing to do. In the most offensive way possible it tells the reader that Villon has written verse unfit to print. Even if true, it is not necessary to blurt it out in this fashion; and for so doing Swinburne's pattering ragtime line in praise of his "sad, bad, glad, mad brother's name" will not atone. Some pleasant paraphrase might easily have been used to save the face of the bashful English reader. A hand so deft as that of Swinburne could surely have touched discreetly on all the dainty beauties of that young body of seduction so vividly recalled by the ancient Armouress when she "made moan for the old sweet days":

"Squatting above the straw-fire's blaze,
The bosom crush'd against the knee,—"

But, despite the ugly asterisks which Swinburne left like pimples on the face of the poem, its authentic picture of the tragedy of all time—beauty in decay—cannot be surpassed.

Last winter in the midst of affairs I made some ballades. Some time in spring I broke them up and began to remodel. The way of it was this: I had followed the form accurately enough, and found it no very difficult thing to do after a few trials. But I rebelled against the inadequate gamut of rhyme; the rectangular effect; the absolute lack of curve. I had read John Payne's translations of Villon, noting the "Ballad of Old Time Ladies," before I had come across

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the exquisite rendering of that ballade by Rossetti. And studying Payne's translations, and also the ballades and other forms in the aforementioned anthology, I dissented from their mode of construction to the extent of thinking that in English linked stanzas of the Romanesque order should not be made entirely dependent upon preceding stanzas for rhyme-tones. The rule is irrational; the result satiety. The first stanza of a ballade in English will appear shapely and sound well if at all well done. But continuance of the same rhyme-tones through the second stanza will induce a faded effect, and the ideas, if any there happen to be, are apt to seem trite. As we enter the third stanza, we feel a sense of stuffiness from the same rhyme breathed too often; and generally by the time we find ourselves in the envoy we are longing to open a window in the thing and let in some fresh air. In prosody it is, of course, well to insist upon rules, if they be good rules. But one must not let rules become impertinent; above all if they sin against euphony. This is true for all matters of language, and need hardly be argued; none but a grammarian would hold otherwise. Touching on grammar, by the way, brings to mind that rule concerning the verb *to be*. Suppose the French, in forming their language, had been dominated by schoolmen with abnormal respect for what they would call logic, but with ears dull to the cadence of vowels. Then the French of to-day, instead of rising above the rule of the verb *to be* when

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euphony requires, as, vastly to their credit, they do, would now be trying to say "c'est je" instead of "c'est moi." The French, civilized beyond other races, recognize that clarity and euphony must be maintained as principles above all rules in language. For myself, when I am called upon to choose between a rule of grammar and my ear, always I bow to my ear. Thus I answer "me" to the query "who's there"; and I prefer to say "that's her" instead of "that's she."

Accepting euphony, then, as a principle above all rules in prosody, I submit that in English the strict French form of ballade has too much drone about it to be desirable. It may sound otherwise, of course, in another language. With the French a "rime riche" goes well; with us it is an insipid pun, unendurable in serious or even comic verse. So to the French the tone-value of their ballade may be great. That is an affair of the French. But it does not follow that we must either take it or leave it unchanged; it does not follow that writers of English may not modify the tone and at the same time retain the finest effect of the form. This has been done. I have already referred to a rendering by Dante Gabriel Rossetti of Villon's best-known ballade. Here it is:

TELL me now in what hidden way is
Lady Flora the lovely Roman?
Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thais,
Neither of them the fairer woman?
Where is Echo, beheld of no man,
Only heard on river and mere,—
She whose beauty was more than human?
But where are the snows of yester-year?

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Where's Heloise, the learned nun,
For whose sake Abeillard, I ween,
Lost manhood and put priesthood on?
From love he won such dule and teen!
And where, I pray you, is the Queen
Who willed that Buridan should steer
Sewed in a sack's mouth down the Seine?
But where are the snows of yester-year?

White Queen Blanche, like a queen of lilies,
With a voice like any mermaiden,—
Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice
And Ermengarde, the lady of Maine,—
And that good Joan whom Englishmen
At Rouen doom'd and burn'd her there,—
Mother of God, where are they then?—
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an overword,—
But where are the snows of yester-year?
(The Ballad of Dead Ladies.)

Now compare the above Rossetti form with two other versions of this ballade in the strict French form, the first by John Payne, the second by Andrew Lang.

I.

TELL me where, in what land of shade,
Bides fair Flora of Rome, and where
Are Thais and Archipiade,
Cousins-german of beauty rare,
And Echo, more than mortal fair,
That, when one calls by river flow
Or marish, answers out of the air?
But what is become of last year's snow?

II.

Where did the learned Heloisa vade,
For whose sake Abelard might not spare

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Such dole for love on him was laid
Manhood to lose and a cowl to wear?
And where is the queen who willed whilere
That Burridan, tied in a sack, should go
Floating down Seine from the turret-stair?
But what has become of last year's snow?

III.

Blanche, too, the lily-white queen that made
Sweet music as she a siren were;
Broad-foot Bertha; and Joan the maid,
The good Lorrainer the English bare
Captive to Rouen and burned her there;
Beatrix, Eremburge, Alys,—lo!
Where are they, Virgin debonair?
But what has become of last year's snow?

Envoi.

Prince, you may question how they fare
This week, or liefer this year, I trow:
Still shall the answer this burden bear:
But what is become of last year's snow?
(Ballade of Old Time Ladies.)

DAY, tell me now in what strange air
The Roman Flora dwells to-day:
Where Archippiada hides, and where
Beautiful Thais has passed away?
Whence answers Echo, afield, astray,
By mere or stream,—around, below?
Lovelier she than a woman of clay;
Nay, but where is the last year's snow?

Where is wise Heloise, that care
Brought on Abeilard, and dismay?
All for her love he found a snare,
A maimed poor monk in orders grey;
And where's the queen who willed to slay
Buridan, that in a sack must go
Afloat down Seine,—a perilous way—
Nay, but where is the last year's snow?

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Where's that White Queen, a lily rare,
With her sweet song, the Siren's lay?
Where's Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice fair?
Alys and Ermengarde, where are they?
Good Joan, whom English did betray
In Rouen town and burned her? No,
Maiden and Queen, no man may say;
Nay, but where is the last year's snow?

Envoi.

Prince, all this week thou need'st not pray,
Nor yet this year the thing to know:
One burden answers, ever and aye,
"Nay, but where is the last year's snow?"
(Ballade of Dead Ladies.)

These three translations preserve the same form, the same ideas, the same names, the same refrain. Rossetti, however, varies the rhyme-tones with each stanza, while Payne and Lang keep strictly to the French mode of three rhyme-tones for the entire poem. Rossetti's version from first to last is echoing a plaintive antique melody in keeping with the burden of the poem; the withered whisper of sedge-grass by some clear pool in a barren land; and in the distance the lute of a troubadour. The tone-value of the other two versions in comparison is—well, some people like the not unmusical buzz of a blue-bottle fly against a window. In a wide world let each one have his choice. But to be quite fair to Payne, who, according to those who should know, was a most exact and scholarly translator, it must be admitted that his rendering of Villon's "Second Ballade of Lords of Old Time" in the strict French manner is a true poem from every

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standpoint, and surpassed in its way only by Rossetti's "Ballad of Dead Ladies," above quoted. Those who may care to follow this phase of ballade structure further should compare Swinburne's translation of Villon's "Women of Paris" on the Rossetti model with the translation of the same ballade by Payne. This ballade is so poor a thing in itself that neither Swinburne nor Payne could make much of a poem out of it, but the comparison will be useful for showing that it is easy enough to contrive in English the strict French model rather than that of Rossetti if any should consider it preferable; to do it either way without loss of idea, figure or sentiment, but not without loss of tone and effective utterance; that will almost always be sacrificed if the strict French model be followed instead of the tone variation of Rossetti.

To one who has the knack of rhyme, conjoined with the faculty which builds or solves verbal puzzles, these linked stanzas are not very difficult. But the selection and control of them is a nice affair. I would stop at no difficulty of construction which would be justified by results; but merely to retain or add metrical restrictions for the sake of surmounting them, or of actually receiving suggestions therefrom, as recommended by one writer, is to debase one's art. Any restriction which is not essential to form or harmony is vicious. Neither complexity, nor rare or difficult modes of writing, have any intrinsic poetic value. No true artist ever thinks an object or utterance more or less beauti-

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ful because of its rarity or intricacy. Such a notion is excusable only in collectors of stamps or insects or blue china. A ruby now is as beautiful as in the days of Solomon, notwithstanding that science has now made it far more common. Gold will always be beautiful and platinum ugly in spite of the false taste which would countenance the use of platinum for jewelry instead of gold on account of its rarity. The Sun would gain nothing in beauty by appearing but once a year. And I assert that altho I have heard a man play tunes very acceptably on a fiddle, balancing himself the while on a slack wire, yet his music had no added value by reason of the difficult position maintained. Rather I appreciated the music the more when I closed my eyes to the acrobat. Yet Gleeson White, an accepted authority in these matters, actually speaks of restrictions as if they had value in themselves, and, referring to French ballades in English, he says: "They must exhibit the art which conceals art, whether by intense care in every minute detail, or a happy faculty for naturally wearing these fetters. The dance in chains must be skilful, the chains worn as decorative adjuncts, and the whole with as much apparent ease as the unfettered dancer could produce."

I am impatient of any such conception of things poetic. A girl's foot compressed to an ugly knob was once a conventional Chinese notion of beauty in the extreme; the so-called "golden lily foot," an unsightly bulb fit to be buried, but surely no lily. Why be such

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a vaudevillian as to ask Terpsichore to try a two-step in chains, or Salome to dance in a hobble skirt? However, Gleeson White has some strong backing for his views. Theophile Gautier, in an essay entitled "The Excellence of Poetry," says:

"Even granting that fine prose is as good as fine verse, which I deny, is the overcoming of all difficulties not to count for anything? * * * I am well aware that there are plenty of people who claim that difficulties should not be taken into account; yet what is art if it be not the means of overcoming the obstacles nature puts in the way of crystallization of thought."

And Andrew Lang, speaking of the ballade, quotes with approval another French writer, M. Lemaitre, as follows:

"The poet who begins a ballade does not know very exactly what he will put into it. The rhyme, and nothing but the rhyme, will whisper things unexpected and charming, things he would never have thought of but for her, all united in the disorder of a dream. Nothing, indeed, is richer in suggestion than the strict laws of these difficult pieces; they force the fancy to wander afield, hunting high and low, and while she seeks through all the world that foot that can wear Cinderella's slipper, she makes delightful discoveries by the way."

Such a poet I would sooner liken to a caterpillar as he goes creeping now this way, now that, among a mass of verbiage, seeking a passable route by which he

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may arrive at some place not in view and unguessed of at the beginning of his tour. Hear, rather, what Baudelaire says:

“A good author is already thinking of his last line as he is penning his first.”

From a height one may overlook the whole of a forest which he is to traverse on his way to an intended goal, and he may see the goal also, without seeing the flowers that will lie in his path, or even all the trees. Thus I agree that seldom can any poem worth while be commenced the end of which is not already determined in the writer's mind. But of course “things unexpected and charming,” as Lemaitre says, may be met with on the tangled way from the first to the last verse. Nevertheless, a true poem is conceived in a moment; at the moulding and lining of it a man may take his time. And this must be as true of a ballade as of any other form of poem. Maintaining this for the content of such a ballade, I have felt that as to tone the modification made by Rossetti of different rhymes for different stanzas will be found more harmonious in our language than the restricted French method of construction, and with some natural diffidence I have attempted to show cause.

The Rossetti form of ballade consists of three stanzas of eight lines and a closing quatrain, each line turning on four accents without regard to syllables. Accent, or stress, as declared by Coleridge, and always tacitly recognized by Scottish and English poets, is

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the one essential feature of verse in English. In all respects except disregard of syllables and variation of rhyme-tones for each stanza, allowing only for the same tone in each third line before the refrain, the Rossetti form of ballade follows the French form first hereinbefore described. In Rossetti's "Ballad of Dead Ladies" many of the rhymes are oblique; some to the extent of being mere assonances. But in this poem they have a rich sweetness as of choice dried fruits. In the closing quatrain Rossetti even repeats the same word in lieu of a rhyme. No matter, his work in this case has grace by its very freedom; the effect is complete. Speaking generally as to the closing quatrain, or envoy, I think it should not perforce be addressed to any particular person; neither should it be regarded as the climax or peroration of the poem. Rather let it be heard as the closing chord; the final echo. That is about all I would say concerning ballades.

Most guitar players are familiar with the old Spanish mode of tuning their instrument. It is still used for some fandangoes and special pieces. But in general a better effect is had by the modern mode of longer intervals between the open strings. And the instrument is still a guitar. I say this because in Quebec one has ventured to vary the villanelle with altered interval and added rhyme, practically compressing the Italian *terza rima* into villanelle form. I submit four such in this book; also three mirelles, using a local form, five stanzas of five lines linked.

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The few who care about these punctilious forms may say that it is an impertinence to alter them; doubtless the many who are indifferent to them will think we make much ado about nothing. For the general public, rightly enough, is as little concerned for the technicalities of verse as for the classifications of the conchologist. Major, minor, minimus, the chief trouble with poets apart from being hard put to it for a living, is that they take themselves too seriously; a failing they share with other artists and a few lone priests, reformers, knights-errant, and such like fellows who follow the gleam. And yet perhaps it is only out of loyalty to their ideal that they trouble to lay emphasis on themselves in a world so overcrowded with respectable materialists. Addressing said materialists, Theophile Gautier, in his essay, "The Utility of Poetry," puts in a plea for himself and his kind this way:

"Write prose as much as you please, but let us write verse. Plant potatoes, but do not pull up tulips. Fatten geese, but do not wring the necks of nightingales. * * * You fancy that happiness consists in properly cooked beefsteaks and sound electoral laws. I think highly of both these things, but comfort is not enough. Every select organization must have art, must have beauty, must have form."

And in his other essay, "The Excellence of Poetry," from which I have already quoted, he says:

"Poets are fit to do other things beside rhyming in

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verse, although I fail to see what better a man can do than write good verse."

That to me sounds right and reasonable enough. But on the other hand a scientific old friend of mine, feeling called upon to speak encouragingly of some verse I had written, said to me recently: "By George, sir, it's fine; I understood every bit of it; it's just as good as prose!" He honestly intended that for a compliment, and I suppose it was—of a sort. But I know that he would not value a cathedral or mosque solely for its seating capacity or acoustic properties; he has the higher sense of architecture. I know that he would not think to praise a painter by telling him that his work was as good as a photograph; and I am sure that observing a rock crystal and an ordinary lump of quartz he would appreciate the intrinsic beauty of form apart from substance. But to any effect in poetic form apart from literal meaning he would appear imperceptive as a clam; built that way, perhaps, or like enough a result of being pestered in youth with metrical versions of the Psalms, or of being made to memorize verse by the yard when he should have been at play. And all the while there is so much verse and so little poetry. This because the form is symbolic, and the content is seldom worthy of the form. Here is a test: If what has been expressed in verse would lose virtue in prose—if it cannot be given such effective utterance in prose—then such verse is poetry. Otherwise, it is only something which may be as good as

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prose, but which usually is not. Yet I will have no quarrel with those who cannot perceive the symbolic value of form in verse; nor for that matter will I quarrel with any of my few good friends to whom these roundabout rhymes which I have written are mere eccentricities to be quietly ignored on account of more understandable doings with which they credit me. After all, we had as well be frank about it, and not pretend to enjoy any phase of art through which the light does not come to us. In art, as in the other practices designed to relieve human hunger or pain—cooking, religion, medicine—we had best be guided simply by the effect upon our own selves. Holding fast to principles I would move loosely among rules whenever any question of beauty is involved. For beauty is something too divine for definition; it will tolerate no limitation or criterion; it is the one thing supreme above all that we conceive as truth, utility or morality; and wherever and however perceived, it is not the mode of perceiving that should engross us, but the fact; the fact that we are privileged above other animals, some of us, to become aware of beauty in any degree at all is to me the most heartening and hopeful thing in life.

TOM McINNES.

Ottawa, September, 1912.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Youth Remaining

DARDON if I ravel rhyme
Out of my head disorderly!
Forgetting how the rats of time
Are nibbling at the bones of me!
But while upon my legs I'm free
Out in the sunlight I intend
To dine with God prodigiously:
Youth is a splendid thing to spend!
Here's to the man who travels still
In the light of young discoveries!
Here's to the fellow of lusty will,
Who drives along and hardly sees
For glamour of great realities
The doom of age! This line I send.
To all who sing hot litanies:
Youth is a splendid thing to spend!
But 'tis not all a matter of years:
'Tis a way of living handily
In a game with Life, while yet appears
A glory near of victory;
With ventures high, and gallantry
Twinkling 'round the nearest bend
Where damsels and fine dangers be:
Youth is a splendid thing to spend!
Fellows, come and ride with me
Swiftly now to the edge of the end,
Holding the Stars of Joy in fee!—
Youth is a splendid thing to spend!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Free Lance

LET me face some bright hazard
Against the rowdy World for you!
A foe to strike, a friend to guard,
Or the looting of some rascal crew,
Oh, the like of this I'm taking to
As on my way I make advance,
And queer vicissitudes come through,
Full of adventure and multiple chance!
So far, you see, I've not been slain,
Tho' now and then I've sought to raid
Some richly opportune domain,
Only to find the plan I made
Baffled by engine or ambuscade;
But I salute the circumstance,
And slip aside; oh, the World is laid
Full of adventure and multiple chance!
And while I'm free to ride ahead,
With here or there some prize in view,
Few dangers of the way I dread,
Tho' oft my hungriness I rue:
Still, betimes a crust will do
Cracking fine to nonchalance,
And every day the World is new,
Full of adventure and multiple chance!
For me the road of many directions—
For me the rhyme of long romance!
For me the World of imperfections—
Full of adventure and multiple chance!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Action

O fat security hath charms
To keep me always satisfied:
What ho! Excursions and alarms!
A scheme, a plot, a ripping tide
Of rude events to prick my pride,
Or crack the shell of my conceit
Upon the edge of things untried!
This is the fate that I would meet.
Now let some bully thing intrude,
And bugle to the soul of me!
I grow stale with quietude,
And this too safe monotony:
O good my friend or enemy
Call me back to the battling street!
For high low variety—
This is the fate that I would meet.
To more than keep oneself alive
Is the way to live when all is said:
To sight a prize, and chase and strive
With strong will and cunning head
For something surely more than bread,
Or from the bitter steal the sweet,
And steal it while the risk is red—
This is the fate that I would meet.
To conquer finely, or to sink
Debonair against defeat,
This is the rarest grace I think—
This is the fate that I would meet.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Detachment



THE Lords of Karma deal the cards,
But the game we play in our own way:
Now as for me, and as regards
The gain or loss from day to day,
I go detach'd; I mean to say
That I live largely as I please,
Whether it does or does not pay
Among the inequalities.
With duties not too much engross'd,
With profits not too much concern'd,
Not to glean to the uttermost,
Nor grieve for what I might have earn'd,
This for my soul's sake I have learn'd,
Reaching for sweeter things than these:
Pennies and fractions I have spurn'd
Among the inequalities.
Oh damnable palavering
Of pedagogues too regular!
I'd rather be a tramp, or sing
For my living at a bar,
Or peddle peanuts, far by far,
Than lose my reasonable ease
In tow of rule and calendar
Among the inequalities.
Content if I may go a bit
In my own way before I cease;
Living trimly by my wit
Among the inequalities.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade on the Way



ET saints abstract on subtle planes
Revolving occult theories,
Unravel all till naught remains,
And vanish then howe'er they please!
But as for me, in place of these,
The savor of flesh and blood! The zest
And blaze of vast idolatries!
This is the object of my quest.
Let saints who stoop to lift the woe
From off the living and the dead,
On with their heavy labors go
Till all be heal'd and comforted!
But as for me, I seek instead
Assurance to the sparkling crest
Of ecstasies unmerited!
This is the object of my quest.
Beauty to me hath been a name
Holier than all God's avatars:
The unconcern'd eternal Flame
Whose fitful gleams between the bars
Of space and time unto the stars
And outer vacancies attest
Elysium that nothing mars!
This is the object of my quest.
Oh let me for a moment merge
Within the glory vaguely guess'd!
Yea, tho' I perish on the verge!
This is the object of my quest.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Good Women



WOMEN I value as they serve
Us men with all their qualities:
The kindly eye, the winsome curve,
And voice atune for melodies,
Oh, high we hold the worth of these!
But this is the best a man can say
Of factory girls or fine ladies:
Good women give themselves away.
So have our comforts much increas'd,
Despite the neuter maids who cling
To fad or fancy, book or priest,
Perversely 'gainst their fashioning:
Lord, in the end 'tis a sickly thing,
Still order it for us I pray
That mainly without reckoning
Good women give themselves away.
Let sing who will in praise of her
By some unique ambition led,
Queen at college or theatre,
Or class'd in a convent with the dead!
I honor the girls who choose instead
The ancient duties, day by day,
As wives and mothers and makers of bread:
Good women give themselves away.
Little I care what they be doing,
What creed they follow or disobey,
If evermore for our renewing
Good women give themselves away.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Virtues



WE make too much of right and wrong:
Three virtues sum it all, nor less
Nor more, and we who crawl along
By light of them our way may guess
Out of the world's ungodly mess,
Whether we look to the cross, or whether
To idols of genial heathenness:
We who are all in the mud together.
Courage, cleanliness, charity:
There are no virtues fixt but these:
On these, the sole essential three,
We base our rising tendencies,
And various moralities
To suit our age, or maybe the weather,
Or stress of chance necessities:
We who are all in the mud together.
Many to ancient names, and some
To newer creeds and altars cling:
But shining down the ages come
Three virtues, never altering,
By which alone our souls we bring
Out of the primal ooze and nether
Gulfs whence we are clambering:
We who are all in the mud together.
Courage, cleanliness, charity:
Hold by these to the end of the tether,
For only these may lead us free:
We who are all in the mud together.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Meddlers

A PLAGUE on those who would regulate
Every detail of our troubled lives!
Let's eat and drink and fight and mate
And leave to God what then survives!

Thus every man for himself contrives
His inexact best quality:

Ministers, medicals, meddlesome wives,
Go your way and let folks be!

O anxious saviours of men and such
Thanks for your help in our evil plight!
But please don't save us all too much!

When God woke up and call'd for light
He set things turning from left to right,
A good enough sign it seems to me
That we shall turn thus without you—quite:
Go your way and let folks be!

For man and beast and imp and elf
One rule is writ in language terse:
Each must answer to himself

In the sequence of the universe:
And we may crawl from the primal curse
Fast if we choose, or leisurely,

But meddlers aye make matters worse:
Go your way and let folks be!

Maybe a helping hand is the best
Signal from God that ever we see:
But that's one thing, and for the rest,
Go your way and let folks be!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Friends



CHANGE myself, and so no more
Will cry against inconstancy:
The chiefest pals I had of yore
Without offence may tire of me:
And they are free, and I am free,
To seek new faces down the line—
But yet I say wherever I be:
All good fellows are friends of mine!
No talk of race or caste or creed;
No fault of hair, no shade of skin,
Shall bar me of my choice, indeed
The sweetest nut may lie within
The toughest shell; 'twould be a sin
To lose a comrade, or resign
My company for cause so thin:
All good fellows are friends of mine!
They fail us now and then, of course;
And some are rascals more or less:
Some cajole us to endorse,
And leave us in the lurch: oh, yes;
But to relieve our loneliness
If only for a day is fine:
For that we owe them some, confess:
All good fellows are friends of mine!
Whether at sea or whether on shore,
Or at the job or over the wine;
Whether on two legs, whether on four—
All good fellows are friends of mine!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Lady of Ventures

Mirelle.

I ADY of Ventures weaving gold
From next to nothing tell me, pray,
Some novel thing to do! Unfold
Some fine employ or project bold
Or sly detour along my way!

From London town to far Cathay
The many live in drab durance:
But evermore your colors play,
Lady of Ventures, grave or gay,
Over the regions of Romance.

And some who find you sideways glance,
Nor scorn to reach thro' gates obscure
Forbidden vistas that entrance,
And glimmer with caprice and chance
To alter destinies grown dour.

Whether to some moonlit amour,
Or quest of hidden treasury,
Or valiant or outlandish lure,
They follow you, and think for sure
'Tis worth whatever the cost may be.

Thro' drear lanes of poverty,
Thro' little shops, and garrets old,
I've seen you wander truantly,
And pass tiptoe, and beckon me,—
O Lady of Ventures weaving gold!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Jacqueline

I MET by chance a milliner,
A girl by name of Jacqueline:
June-sweet was the voice of her,
And wonderful eyes of aquamarine,
Pale blue and pale green,
Appeal'd from her face of ivory,
Too wild to care how she were seen
Down town o' nights with me.
In a fussy shop thro' daylight hours
Trimly she fashion'd vanities;
Scraps of birds, and crazy flowers,
Trifles of straw and fripperies,
To put on the heads of fine ladies:
But after six, when she was free,
Jacqueline went as you please
Down town o' nights with me.
Jacqueline was a good chum
For gay streets and vaudeville;
And I spent my coin, when I had some,
For the pleasure it was to see her feel
The light dream of the moment real,
Or hearken awhile to her velvety
Low laughter over a meal
Down town o' nights with me.
Jacqueline has gone away
To marry a man of property;
Jacqueline no more will play
Down town o' nights with me.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Picaroon

I KNEW him for a picaroon
Among the purlieus of the town:
At free lunch in a beer saloon
To wash the cheese and pickles down,
With pretzels hard and salt and brown,
We drank and talk'd of all our schemes
To banish Fortune's chronic frown:
He was a fine fellow of dreams.
He loved the light piquant details
Of life beyond mere livelihood;
And while he cover'd many trails
More tricks he play'd and girls he woo'd
And bottles emptied than he should
For that success the World esteems:
But after a fashion he made good:
He was a fine fellow of dreams.
Because I heard his death to-night
Told in the hotel corridor
I left the crowd for the cool starlight
And the lone ways: my heart was sore
That I should see his face no more
Where the wheel turns, and the light gleams,
And the air reels to the World's uproar:
He was a fine fellow of dreams.
My friend he was and he died too soon:
'Tis always too soon for his like it seems:
But he lived while he lived, that picaroon—
He was a fine fellow of dreams.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Villanelle of Mutton

Old Style.



VERY sick and tired I am
Of stewed prunes, and apples dried,
And this our mutton that once was lamb!

I will make no grand salaam
For the stale cakes the gods provide!
Very sick and tired I am!

My indignant diaphragm
Would cover something fresh, untried,—
Not this mutton that once was lamb!

How every verse and epigram
Of hope the lagging years deride!
Very sick and tired I am!

Must I always then be calm,
And talk as one quite satisfied
With this our mutton that once was lamb?

Frankly, I don't give a dam
For taste of things too long denied!
Very sick and tired I am
Of this our mutton that once was lamb!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Mirelle of Found Money



GOT a thousand dollars to-day
By chance and undeservedly:
But nary a one of my debts will I pay:
Sure it never was meant to be spent that
way:
'Tis a gift from my fairy godmother, you
see.

Except of course to my landlady,
And some on account to the tailor Malone:
And there'll be a new dress, and a hat maybe,
For the lame girl who is good to me:
But the rest of these dollars are all my own.

A thousand dollars and all for my own:
The thought of it runs like a tune through my head:
So long it is since I have known
One lavish hour, one fully blown
Rose of joy unheralded!

Tho' we of the world must grind for bread
'Tis a plan I hold in small esteem:
And while I can taste I let no dread
Of later want contract the spread
Of my desire for cakes and cream.

Wrapt in myself, obscure, supreme,
I slip thro' streets and quarters gay,
And the comic crowd I see in a dream,
But glory be—this is no dream:
I got a thousand dollars to-day!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Fine Eating

HIGH up I climb'd in a cherry tree:
Heigho, how the years have fled!
June and the World lay under me,
While the juicy fruit just overhead
Hung clustering thick and ripe and red,—
For a boy of ten 'twas a glorious sight:
Say, do you wonder now that I said:
Bully for my big appetite!
Far in the North I sought for gold:
Foolish I was and most unfit:
Starving, alone, and numb with cold,
When I found on the trail a dog-biscuit:
How I gnaw'd its edges bit by bit!
'Twas a savory thing to crunch and bite,
And I fed on every crumb of it:
Bully for my big appetite!
But give me a friend this night for a feast,
And one well-served exquisite dish!
He may have what he will of bird or beast,
Or take his choice of fat sea-fish;
And we'll drink of the best thing liquorish,
Bottled in years of old delight,
To wake on our palate the lost relish:
Bully for my big appetite!
Me for a nook in a fine kafay,
With any potvaliant rake to-night!
And if to-morrow the Devil's to pay—
Bully for my big appetite!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Mirelle of the Good Bed



HERE'S nothing so good as a good bed
When a body is over and done with day!
I'd like a place to lay my head
In a clean room unfrequented
And dark, unless for a moon-ray.

O Angel of Dreams, without delay
Then let me from this World be gone!
Within a temple I would pray
Where golden odors float alway
Onward to oblivion.

Or haply may I be withdrawn
From pain and care and manners mean
Into some fairy tower whereon
The glim bejewell'd gonfalon
Of blue enchantery is seen?

But a lady I know might come between
Laughing, and lead me far astray
On the flowery edge of a wild ravine
Where wild cascades of waters green
Flash in the pleasant light of May.

Thus let me dream the night away,
Or slumber dreamless with the dead!
Life may resume, but now I say,
Being too weary of the day,
There's nothing so good as a good bed!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the House of Ease

HELLO, MARIE! You sweet old girl,
You of the Province cool and true,
I'm fagg'd and done with the City whirl,
And I've come for quieting to you!

I'm out of the game, Marie; I'm through,
And want but a chair in the sunlight placed,
With nothing to do, dear, nothing to do—
Give me now these hours to waste!

Something to eat? Well, after while
I'd like a chicken fricassee
Cream'd in good Acadian style
With ketchup and things peppery,
And a twist of bread and pot o' tea:

A supper that to the Queen's taste
If you will cook it! But, Marie,
Give me now these hours to waste!

My Lady in your House of Ease,
Clean of all pretence and mask,
Let me lounge just as I please,
Tossing from me every task!
Let me like some lizard bask
Fatly with my soul effaced

In the sun! No more I ask—
Give me now these hours to waste!

For I've been troubled overlong,
And I'd be quit of stress and haste,
And quit of doing, right or wrong,—
Give me now these hours to waste!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Golden Days

I WEARY of living from hand to mouth,
 Battling for mean necessities:
 I'm in a desert, and a drouth
 Comes over all the oases
 Where I have sought myself to ease
In lawful and unlawful ways:
 I had no care for things like these
Far away in the Golden Days.
Let me go where my father went—
 My father who was good to me!
This World has grown so virulent
 And sodden now with misery!
 But once we fought it joyously,
Ever on some crusade ablaze
 For spicy isles o' the wind-swept sea—
Far away in the Golden Days.
Oh with some glad intoxicant
 These wasted nerves of mine relieve!
Do me a magic, and enchant
 These sordid chambers to conceive
 In crimson colors, while I weave
My fancies to the airy phase
 Of things he taught me to believe—
Far away in the Golden Days.
Nay, what now? What aura strange—
 What glamour of new life allays
This old despair? Again I range
 Far away in the Golden Days.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Defeat

Villanelle.



E may dream of what hath been,
But this will alter all our ways:
This is the thing that was not foreseen.

Tho' we avoid the rabble gaze
Yet must we keep some face to show:
We are untouch'd, the World says.

Haply the World may never know
The marish grief and bitterness
That covers us; 'tis better so.

For we who gloried to excess
Now only ask that none may see
These hours averted, comfortless.

Of our defeat there yet may be
Some gray reward in after days:
Oh ache my heart—but quietly!

While the shadow with us stays
We may dream of what hath been;
But this will alter all our ways—
This is the thing that was not foreseen.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Evil

EVIL! What poor argument
We mortals hear to make us trust
That as for God he never meant
To bait this hook of pain with lust!
Then by what devil was it thrust
Thro' the filmy first upheaval
Of our planetary dust?
No man knoweth the end of evil.
By dint of wishing, sages say,
Things shape themselves much as we see;
And filth and pain are the price we pay
Largely for the will to be;
That we evolve contingently
On such acceptance and receival:
Is this the measure of God's mercy?
No man knoweth the end of evil.
Say if you choose there is naught but good:
Harden your heart and soften your brain:
Say wrong is right misunderstood:
Close your eyes to filth and pain:
Swear all is right and all is sane,
And all correct from days primeval:
And then—well, then what will you gain?
No man knoweth the end of evil.
We strive in mud forever obscure,
Forever in hope of some reprieval,
But living or dead we are not sure:
No man knoweth the end of evil.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Woeful Certainties



W E must kill if we would live:
This is the first of certainties:
God leaves us no alternative
Despite the preachers' sophistries:
Let them argue as they please
The jungle law is over us!
For any man who cares or sees
This World of ours goes ruinous.
We must weak and ugly grow:
This is the worst of certainties:
'Tis a pretty thing to be young, I know,
And life is full of pleasantries:
But age and pain will bend the knees
Of the strongest, fairest, best of us:
No bodies reach beyond disease:
This World of ours goes ruinous.
We must all in the graveyard lie:
This is the last of certainties:
Strange horizons some descry,
That to the mass are fantasies:
But take your choice of theories
To meet an end so villainous,
In this at least each one agrees:
This World of ours goes ruinous.
Brother, I see too much to think
That dust is the utter end of us:
But oft from what's involved I shrink:
This World of ours goes ruinous.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Tiger of Desire

Villanelle.



TARVING, savage, I aspire
To the red meat of all the World:
I am the Tiger of Desire!

With teeth bared, and claws uncurl'd,
By leave o' God I creep to slay
The innocent of all the World.

Out of the yellow glaring day,
When I glut my appetite,
To my lair I slink away.


But in the black returning night
I leap resistless on my prey,
Mad with agony and fright.

The quick flesh I tear away,
Writhing till the blood is hurl'd
On leaf and flower and sodden clay.

My teeth are bared, my claws uncurl'd,
Of the red meat I never tire;
In the black jungle of the World
I am the Tiger of Desire!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Body Diseased

 O think the sky should be so blue,
And the air still yield its clean caress!
That I should see these flowers that strew
The altar of God's loveliness
And cease adoring now! Ah yes,
But something foul within me squirms
A trail of bloody rottenness!
I will not live upon these terms.
Must I who had of youth and bliss
In fullest measure be content
Merely to live in mire like this?
Shall my remaining days be spent
And my loved body now be lent
As stuff that alters or confirms
Some medical experiment?
I will not live upon these terms.
I shall end it when I choose
If it can end so easily!
Dripping Upas avenues
Before me loom unhappily:
Things magnified too monstrously
From infinite mephitic germs
Are loosed on me indecently:
I will not live upon these terms.
O stricken body, now for you
Decay, and the silent work of worms!
To think the sky should be so blue!
I will not live upon these terms.

Rhymes of a Rounder Elysium

Villanelle.



OTHER, for a moment come
To the bars that intervene:
Tell me of Elysium!

Tell me how you live serene
Upon that fair and lovely shore:
Free of grief and burdens mean!

For I so broken am and sore
To me God's mercy now 'twould seem
To die indeed and be no more.


You are with the Seraphim,
While below I wander on,
Groping through a fearful dream.

My love of life at last is gone:
Of life what favor may I glean
Outvaluing oblivion?

Here for dim relief I lean:
O Mother, for a moment come
To the bars that intervene!
Unveil, unveil Elysium!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Self Concealed

 HIS of you is not the best,
This little self so anxious here:
Partially you manifest,
But you are other than the mere
Mind and body you appear:
Behind the scenes it seems to me,
From day to day and year to year,
You remain essentially.
You wake and sleep: the small impress
Of things around soon passes: still
This consciousness is more or less
Some phosphorescence of the Will:
A surface light too weak to fill
The underlying entity
Whose lust of living naught may kill:
You remain essentially.
And while your body wears away,
And all your thoughts disintegrate,
You weave new vestures every day,
And dreams with dreams obliterate:
For you the outer ways await
Because of your desire to be:
But high or low, thro' every state,
You remain essentially.
From life to life you dwell within
A candle gleam of memory;
And as it vanishes—what then?
You remain essentially.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Mystic and the Mud

I F I from universal mud
By chance malign came bubbling
Uncouthly into flesh and blood,
Ugly, futile, struggling,
All in mud again to bring,—
Why then at the heart of me
What is this that needs must sing?
There is no end to mystery.
If I, with reverence, would read
Upon the mud God's autograph,
And find instead a wormy screed,
With never a sign on my behalf
To light my coming epitaph,—
Why then at the heart of me
What is this that needs must laugh?
There is no end to mystery.
If I, a mere automaton
In a brief and paltry play,
Am but a group of atoms drawn
Powerless upon my way
To mud again, as savants say,—
Why then at the heart of me
What is this that needs must pray?
There is no end to mystery.
Brother, kneel intuitive
To a stone if you will, or a carven tree!
And sing and laugh and pray—and live!
There is no end to mystery.

Rhymes of a Rounder

God's Kaleidoscope



UCH too much of this I have heard:
The World is growing forever old,
Its flowers perish in the mould,
And all things pass as a tale that is told:


Life is a glimmer, fading fast
Into the charnel of the Past,
And Death is ever the final word.
O much too much of this I have heard!
Of course we know that all things flow,
But yet, as some other Greek, explains,
The all is fasten'd with great chains,
And neither you nor I can dream
How this or that can slip from the Scheme:
Why ask of the dusk what it does with the dawn,
Or ask where the end of the circle has gone,
Or where into what the wind blows?
Yet this one questions of last year's snows,
This other, because of a wither'd rose,
Argues for me a blank to-morrow,
And, in the very light of dawn,
He bids me of his wine-cup borrow
What he resents—oblivion!
O great Omar! I bow to you,
And nod familiar to Villon,
But I have neither hope nor fear
O' being disperst in the atmosphere:
Oblivion—I wish there were
Such easy exit on the air,
Beyond desire, beyond regret,

Rhymes of a Rounder

And clearly out of anywhere:
To be, so far as we're concern'd,
An issue without sequence—nay
Too much of Nature's game we've learn'd
To credit that, I think, Omar!
Your rose has wither'd—well, that's clear;
But of itself 'twas a passing phase,
And may again on a day of the days
From the undistinguish'd mass appear,
As much itself as is itself
Now in the light of your partial eye:
And as for the snows of yester-year,
Why, every flake of them still is here:
No one of all has 'scaped from charge
In sea or sky or whirling storm:
So looking at it by and large
It seems entirely a matter of form:
There is no pit of nothingness
Wherein what is can e'er be less,
And we may say of everything
It is itself continuing:
The very shadows that we see
Are fast involved; 'tis a safe guess
No thing has been, no thing can be,
That is not now essentially;
And evermore we yet may hope
Within our little nets to rope
Some of that endless element
Of mystery and beauty blent
With the turning of God's kaleidoscope.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Comfortable Doctrine

 O we have come to life, it seems,
And would escape the consequence;
And many men, with many schemes,
Would tell us how and why and whence;
Good friends, I do you reverence,
But weary of your subtleties:
I only pray, when we go hence,
God will put us all at ease.
Maybe some Jack-o'-Lantern gleams
Across the swamp of my offence;
Maybe too high my heart esteems
God's ultimate benevolence;
Of knowledge I make no pretence,
My one religion's been to please,
But this I hold in confidence:
God will put us all at ease.
By night more faith I have in dreams
Than ever by day in common-sense;
And there's more of night than day meseems,
And weird deeps beyond science
To test our wee intelligence
And little glow-worm theories:
At night I think, for recompense,
God will put us all at ease.
Brother, I find some evidence,
Despite our many miseries,
That after life's last negligence
God will put us all at ease.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Polity



WITH good-will, and a touch of mirth,
To clear and clean and plant and plan
The common levels of the Earth:—
What more should God then ask of Man?

Rhymes of a Rounder

Economy



HE fine contempt that Christ felt
For his coat, and cash, and wherewithal,
Is a virtue too occasional
Methinks for our continuance!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Justice




PARE him, you say! So be it, then!
But I think it a maudlin kindliness,
And fear some day for better men
'Twill breed a villainous excess!

'Tis easy enough to be merciful,
But to be just is an excellence
Beyond all flight of sentiment!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Persistence

 HE pains of Life are all too many,
And the Way is doubtful everywhere;
But I have gone as far as any,
And seen—and I do not despair!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Easy Way

AOD I think is a balancer,
And runs the World by compromise:
From brief observing I infer
His line of least resistance lies
Curving smoothly thro' the skies,
Forever mixing night and day,
With all that such a thing implies:
Myself, I go the easy way.
'Tis a good thing at times to fight:
To give a blow, and take a blow,
And hand it back with gather'd might:
'Tis the bully plan of the World below:
And yet somehow as we older grow
We're not so keen for every fray:
We'd liefer miss than meet a foe:
Myself, I go the easy way.
Troubles a-plenty we may not pass:
Tangles too many we cannot untie:
And there's a pitiful end for us all, alas!
But we can slip round so much, if we try,
Or stay things off till by and by
We find they mostly are off to stay,
Or matter no more at all: that's why
Myself, I go the easy way.
And the value of laughter, the value of tears,
And the meaning of Life may be as it may:
In the bitter-sweet wisdom of later years
Myself, I go the easy way.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Aspiration

BUT give me the air! Always the air!
The clean ways, and wings, wings,
To reach beyond accepted things,
And venture flights unendable!

Rhymes of a Rounder

White Magic

CANDOR may be devilish,
And truth untimely open Hell:
Better pretend the thing you wish;
Anon you may, if you wish and wish,
Achieve a miracle.

Once an ugly truth I saw,
And I hid it with a lie;
Cunning, for I knew the law,
I cover'd it, and smother'd it,
And kill'd it with a lie:
No man there was that knew of it,
And many days went by.

Lo, something fair hath risen like
A lily from the sod!
And the lie is now the truth of it,
Become the splendid truth of it,—
Glory be to God!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Departure

LET me from this World go free
Before the last of me is spent!
While yet some few fair girls lament,
And some good fellows cherish me!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Faith



THINK between my cradle-bars
Of a summer night there fell to me
Some pale religion of the stars,
While an old Moon lookt weirdly

At me thro' an apple-tree
And fixt my faith in a fair One
Fading out of memory:
But I would that I knew where my Lord is gone!
Things there are by night I know
That in the day I ne'er detect:
Stars that shine from long ago
Until bewilder'd I suspect
The obvious World is not correct,
And fear too much to lean upon
The showings of mere intellect:
But I would that I knew where my Lord is gone!
In my own fashion I persist:
No counsel of despair I brook:
Neither for priest nor pessimist,
Nor the jealous God nor his black Book:
My early faith I've not forsook
For the low things that pass anon:
With eyes unspoil'd to the stars I look—
But I would that I knew where my Lord is gone!
And caring less how the World esteems
Me or my doing I go on
With incommunicable dreams—
But I would that I knew where my Lord is gone!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Good-Bye

Villanelle

ALL things are reapt beneath the sky,
And I'll be gone before the year:
Girl, in October we say good-bye!

Remember how the May was mere
With white and green and violet!
Remember all that follow'd, dear!

How June, with wreath and coronet
Of many roses amorous
Led us dreaming deeper yet!

Thro' red July victorious
To August, ample, passionate!
No lovers e'er had more than us.

Now bronze September soon will set:
I want no life extended drear
Till Youth and Summer we forget.

O Autumn, haunted, sweet and sere!
All things are reapt beneath the sky!
And I'll be gone before the year:
Girl, in October we say good-bye!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Rags

ONCE to my fancy I was drest,
Ready to challenge the ways of chance:
Body and bone were of the best,
And I rode away in the blue distance
And ravisht Life in high joyance
Of all her many beauties: Hey,
How now with alter'd countenance
I go in the rags of yesterday!
Once I went largely at my ease,
And humor'd myself with fine gusto;
Nor riches then, nor dignities
I sought, but the rare scenario
Where love is wrought to a rosy glow
With clinging to forbidden clay:
And I had it and had it and had it—so
I go in the rags of yesterday!
I have no heart for the poverty
That comes to all—you understand:
Yet with these relics left to me,
This jewell, this ribbon contraband,
From my illicit vanisht land,
I keep what fashion I may—but say
Is there no future in my hand?
I go in the rags of yesterday!
Oh tell me I'll travel sometime in style
To a fair estate so far and away!
For I sing me a weary tune the while
I go in the rags of yesterday!

Rhymes of a Rounder

To the Night

Cantel:

GOOD luck to all who throng
The ways of laughter and song!
But if for some they seem too brief—
For some they seem too long.

Myself I have been a great thief
Of pleasure to lighten one grief,
But now—say now do you fancy it wrong
If I turn to the night for relief?

Good luck to all who throng
The ways of laughter and song!
But weary I turn to the night for relief—
And I pray that the night be long.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Sleep

I'VE lost my taste for things somehow
That on a time were very sweet:
Sin has no savor for me now,—
I find no apples good to eat:
You laugh, and say that I'm effete,
But you are on the way, my friend,
And after me you'll soon repeat:
Sleep is the best thing in the end.
Yet I come not with sour intent
Against my old desires to prate:
Truly I do not repent,
I only wish I knew some great
Exultant vice to stimulate
What spark of Life remains to spend:
But this I feel, as the hour grows late,
Sleep is the best thing in the end.
All things wear out, so much we see:
All things must fall without reprieve:
Yet spite of that invincibly
Upon the brink I still believe
That God has hidden up his sleeve
For us some golden dividend:
What think you then we shall receive?
Sleep is the best thing in the end.
Brother, down on a soundless bed
From the ways of pain may we descend!
The stars creep dimly overhead:—
Sleep is the best thing in the end.

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of the Lost Castle

ONCE upon a time there stood
A Castle by the Western sea:
Near by there was a gnomish wood
Ancient and wild with glamorie
Of ferly things wrought secretly:
There I was free as it were mine,
For those who ruled were kin to me:
But the Lords o' the Castle are dead lang syne!
Oft in that wood from my old beldame
I fled thro' husht elf-haunted ways:
But the clatter there was when the gay Lords came
Laughing back from their brave forays!
Great sport they had, and high feast days,
Follow'd by long red nights of wine,
With ball and banquet rooms ablaze:
But the Lords o' the Castle are dead lang syne!
A moment now to me it seem'd
As if low golden bells had rung
Out of the forest where I dream'd
Years ago when I was young:
And even now 'twas on my tongue
To tell a tale too fair and fine
For the like of these I dwell among:
But the Lords o' the Castle are dead lang syne!
Slow accumulating hours!
And the last rays of the Sun shine
Redly over the ruin'd towers!
But the Lords o' the Castle are dead lang syne!

Rhymes of a Rounder

With the Seven Sleepers

Cantel

O FAIRY, take me far
To some enchanted star!
Let me go sleep for a thousand years
Where the Seven Sleepers are!

Beyond the striving spheres,
Beyond all hopes or fears,
Where never a black or golden bar
Of Hell or Heaven appears!

O Fairy, take me far
Away from things that are!
Let me go sleep for a thousand years
In some enchanted star!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Ballade of Waiting



HERE was a time that Death for me
Unbalanced every new delight:
Its cold abhorrent mystery
Haunted me by day and night:
I felt its noisome clammy blight
Making of Life a mildew'd thing:
But now to its face I cry: Alright!
I'm no afraid for the outgoing!
Because so many I loved have gone
I stare a-wondering at the skies:
The World below I look upon
With listless, old, exhausted eyes:
The while for every friend who dies
I feel a queerish loosening
Within of all familiar ties:
I'm no afraid for the outgoing!
I weary under a weight of days,
Withering and too sensible
Of aged needs and alter'd ways:
But this one thing is good to tell:
In the wintry desert where I dwell
Some rumor I have heard of Spring,
And I have dream'd of asphodel:
I'm no afraid for the outgoing!
The sweet renewal of the air,
And the call of Youth recovering,—
Do these await me yet somewhere?
I'm no afraid for the outgoing!

Rhymes of a Rounder

The Isles of Gold

Cantel

AWAY from days too cold,
Away from hearts too old,
Honey-Mouth, O Honey-Mouth,
I go to the Isles of Gold!

Will it be to North or South
That I find them, Honey-Mouth?
The King no entry there I'm told
Except to the dead alloweth!

So be it, from days too cold!
So be it, from hearts too old!
Honey-Mouth, O Honey-Mouth,
I go to the Isles of Gold!

Rhymes of a Rounder

Notes

BALLADE OF THE PICAROON:—"He has much wrong resting on himself, and has crept through the worm-holes of all sorts of errors, in order to be able to reach many obscure souls on their secret paths. Forever dwelling in some kind of love, and some kind of selfishness and enjoyment. Powerful and at the same time obscure and resigned. Constantly loafing in the sunshine, and yet knowing the ladder which leads to the sublime to be near at hand."—Friedrich Nietzsche.

VILLANELLE OF MUTTON:—Dam—A coin I am told of small value, used somewhere in the Orient, perhaps India, and there giving rise to a familiar phrase, as did the coin known as a "rap" in Ireland. This in explanation, lest the writer be thought profane.

MIRELLE OF FOUND MONEY:—"Gerard de Nerval lived the transfigured inner life of the dreamer. 'I am very tired of life!' he says. And like so many dreamers, who have all the luminous darkness of the universe in their brains, he found his most precious and uninterrupted solitude in the crowded and more sordid streets of great cities."—Arthur Symons.

BALLADE OF FINE EATING:—In the matter of fine eating, and in maintaining it as something more

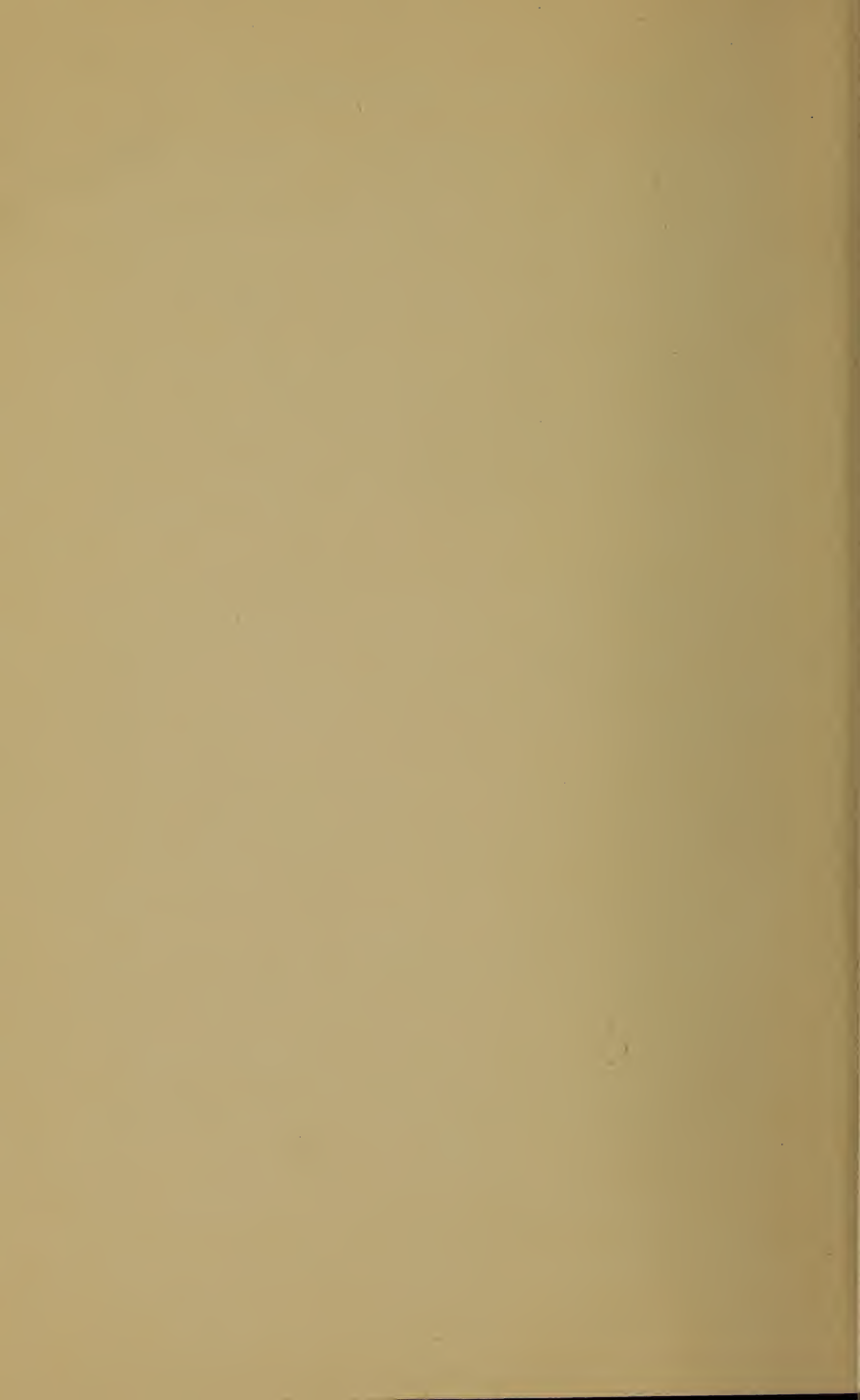
Rhymes of a Rounder

than the meat, the good Sir Thomas Browne thus commended Epicurus: "He (Epicurus) was contented with bread and water, and when he would dine with Jove, and pretend unto epulation, he desired no other addition than a piece of Cytheridian cheese."

GOD'S KALEIDOSCOPE:—The doggerelle was anciently a form nearest to the impromptu chant; but nowadays it is seldom used to serious purpose. The doggerelle is not the pursuit of a tale, as some have supposed, but is an irregular versicle designed to catch elusive ideas.

POLITY, ET AL.:—In a little workshop under my hat are some broken ballades and unused lines, from which I have hastily contrived these few quatrains, having now neither time nor inclination to do more with them.

THE END.



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